

Buhl Sons Company Complex (Adair Street Warehouse)
120-234 Adair Street
Detroit
Wayne County
Michigan

HAER No. MI-13

HAER
MICH,
82-DETRO,
45-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
MID-ATLANTIC REGION NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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Buhl Sons Company Complex (Adair Street Warehouse)

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Location: 120-234 Adair Street
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

USGS Detroit Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: 17.334220.4689220

Present Owner: American Natural Resources Company
1 Woodward Avenue
Detroit, Michigan 48226

Present Occupant: None

Present Use: None. Slated for demolition in August 1984

Significance: The complex is significant on two grounds. First, it has historical associations with the Buhl family, one of Detroit's leading industrial and commercial families of the last two centuries. Second, it is an unusually ornate example of a warehouse and was designed by John Scott, a prominent Detroit architect.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Dates of erection: The oldest and largest segments of this warehouse complex were designed by the Detroit architectural firm of John Scott & Company in 1919 and completed the following year. The principal building is a reinforced concrete L-shaped structure, with the main axis running north and south, just east of Adair Street, and an ell extending to the east along the Detroit River. The original construction includes a single-story, steel-framed building extending east and north from the six-story concrete building and attached to it. The dates are confirmed by Building Permits No. 4564 and 4564A (May 19, 1919) and No. 4640 (April 26, 1920).

Three additional buildings of later vintage make up the rest of the Buhl warehouse complex. The first is a single-story, steel-framed rectangular brick building at the southeast corner of Adair and Wight, and measures 133 feet by 180 feet (Building Permit No. 18203, September 1, 1923). It was designed for use as a garage. The Detroit architectural firm of Talbot & Meir designed the building, with construction begun in 1923 and completed at a cost of \$54,000.

The second building, linking the garage with the main warehouse building to the south, was erected by the H. F. Campbell Construction Company in 1957 for \$250,000. This one-story steel and concrete block building measures 170 feet by 260 feet and provided loading docks on Adair Street and additional office space (Building Permit No. 91577, April 25, 1957). Third, there is a single-story Quonset Hut, attached to the northeast corner of the large steel-framed building erected in 1920. The Quonset, measuring 60 feet by 200 feet, was built by Steel Structures, Inc., of Detroit in 1949, at a cost of \$18,000 (Building Permit No. 11315, November 23, 1949).

2. Architect: John Scott (1851-1928) was born in England, studied architecture in Windsor, Ontario, before joining his father's firm, William Scott & Company, in Detroit in 1875. The firm's name was changed to John Scott & Company in 1889. He was best known for his institutional commissions, including the Marquette Branch Prison (1887-1889) in Marquette, Michigan; the West End Cellblock (1889) at the Michigan State Prison in Jackson, Michigan; the Wayne County Building (1902) in Detroit; and the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor. John and William Scott designed a few Detroit industrial plants in the 1880s, including the Steam Radiator Works, the Copper and Brass Roller Mills and the Peninsular Car Works. John Scott rarely designed industrial buildings from that time on. The Buhl Sons Company complex was completed very late in his career.
3. Original and subsequent owners: References to the chain of title to the land upon which the structures stand are in the office of the Wayne County Register of Deeds, City-County Building, Detroit, Michigan.

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|------|--|
| 1917 | Deed, August 11, 1917, recorded in Volume 1189, page 451. Charles W. Kocher and his wife to the Buhl Land Company |
| 1918 | Deed, September 6, 1918, recorded in Volume 1259, p. 561. Charles W. Kocher and his wife to the Buhl Land Company |
| 1962 | Deed, December 31, 1962, recorded in Volume 14939, page 53. Buhl Sons Company to Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Company. |

- 1963 Deed, July 15, 1963, recorded in Volume 15078, page 390. Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Company to Keith Kindred and Associates
- 1972 Deed, March 6, 1972, recorded in Volume 18004, page 919. Keith Kindred and Associates to Ralph Vigliotti, Jr.

4. Alterations and additions: The major additions are delineated in part I, A, 1 above. A half-dozen minor alterations involving non-load-bearing interior walls and partitions were made in the 1950s and 1960s. The most significant of these was the installation of new partitions in 1960, at a cost of \$22,000, in the first floor office area of the building previously completed in 1957 (Building Permit No. 4459, October 11, 1960). Another major alteration involved the second floor of the reinforced concrete warehouse, which originally had the same seventeen-foot ceilings as the office segment. In order to increase storage space, the floor was divided vertically into two floors, each with eight-foot ceilings, with the construction of a mezzanine level in 1944, at a cost of \$23,000 (Building Permit No. 41232, July 18, 1944). One of the freight elevators was modified to serve this new floor.

B. Historical Context

Christian H. Buhl (1812-1894) had a remarkable career in business and public service in addition to his involvement in the hardware business: he was a co-founder of the Michigan State Bank in 1845; invested heavily in plank road companies linking Detroit with Howell, Mt. Clemens and Utica, Michigan, in 1848-1852; served as Mayor of Detroit in 1860 and 1861; was vice-president of the Second National Bank in 1863-1883; and became a major patron of the arts in Detroit during the 1870s and 1880s. In 1855, Christian Buhl became a partner in the hardware firm of Du Charme & Bartholomew (founded in 1849), which then changed its name to Buhl & Du Charme. They operated a store on Woodward Avenue, near Atwater, until 1872, when they built a larger store on West Woodbridge. Du Charme died in January 1873, and the firm's name was changed to Buhl Sons Company. Christian Buhl's son, Theodore DeLong Buhl (1884-1907), not only served as president of the hardware firm for many years, but he also founded and headed the Buhl Stamping Company (established in 1888), the Buhl Malleable Company (established in 1889) and the Buhl Land Company. He became a major stockholder in Parke, David and Company in December 1896, and following the death of founder Harvey Parke in February 1899, Theodore Buhl served as president of the pharmaceutical

firm until his death in 1907. Theodore's son, Arthur H. Buhl, took over the management of most of the family enterprises, including the hardware wholesaling operation.

The Buhl family success in the iron and steel manufacturing industry brought about enormous growth in their hardware business. At the turn of the century, several Buhl enterprises moved into the near east riverfront area of Detroit. In 1899, the Buhls acquired the block bounded by Walker, Wight, Adair and the Detroit River, immediately west of the warehouse complex treated in this report, and established the Buhl Malleable Company manufacturing complex there. The southernmost third of this block was a lumber storage yard until 1918, when the Buhl Sons Company erected three steel-framed warehouses just west of Adair Street. The land immediately east of Adair, south of Wight, was occupied by the W.A.C. Miller Lumber Mill in 1881-1896, by the Salling, Hanson & Company lumber yard in 1896-1916 and, finally, by the C. W. Kotcher Company, also a lumber dealer, from 1916 until 1919, when construction of the surviving warehouse-office complex began. Buhl Sons Company remained there from 1920 until the early 1960s.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: In most respects, this is a typical industrial warehouse complex of the early twentieth century, using a combination of reinforced-concrete and steel-framed designs. Overall, it can be characterized as simple, unadorned, stark, and utilitarian. The southernmost segment of the complex, which housed the firm's offices, is an exception, with considerable decorative treatment on the exterior and interior.
2. Condition of fabric: In excellent condition overall, with no major structural deterioration.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions, framing: The main warehouse building is six stories high, with mushroom columns of reinforced concrete supporting the concrete floors, except on the sixth floor, where square concrete columns support steel beams which carry the flat roof. The main segment measures 105 feet by 379 feet overall and has an ell measuring 98 feet by 130 feet, of the same general design as the larger segment, but is only three stories in height. There is an attached single-story, steel-framed building measuring 130 feet by 250 feet, with sawtooth roof monitors covering the entire building.

A Quonset Hut measuring 60 feet by 200 feet is attached to the northeast corner of the steel-framed building. It is a modification of the original Quonset design. The builder took two huts, cut away approximately one-third of the semi-circular steel frame of each, then bolted the two together and supported the roof with a set of steel columns along the length of the newly-created seam.

A rectangular steel and concrete block building measuring 170 feet by 260 feet, with a flat roof, extends north from the north end of the reinforced concrete warehouse. Further north is the final building in the complex, a steel-framed, brick garage measuring 133 feet by 180 feet, also with a flat roof.

2. Foundations: The reinforced concrete buildings and the steel-framed monitor roof segment rest on thousands of timber pilings driven into the marshy subsurface. There are no cellars.
3. Walls and windows: The southernmost part of the complex, housing the offices, features the extensive use of decorative red brickwork to hide the reinforced-concrete frame, left uncovered on the warehouse segment. Steel-framed industrial sash is used extensively, with the concrete building frame serving as the lintel, and a few courses of brick separating the windows. The remaining buildings have nondescript brick and glass facades.
4. Other: There is a round steel water tower, resting on four steel legs, typical of the style common in the early 1920s.

Description of Interior

1. Floor plans - see the attached sketch plans
 - a. First floor: Office segment of main building. This floor included the payroll office, with a pay window, separate locker rooms for the warehouse and office workers, and a meeting room.
 - b. Second floor: Office segment of main building. This floor, housing most of the offices, is an impressive space, with seventeen-foot ceilings supported by concrete columns with mushroom capitals. It included a large walk-in vault and a half dozen private offices for Mr. Buhl, other top officials, and their secretaries.

- c. Third floor: Office segment of main building. There is additional general business office space, an employees' lunchroom, and a small stage used by employees to put on shows

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings

Scott, John & Company. Architectural drawings, "Warehouse and Office For Buhl Sons Company, Foot of Adair Street, John Scott & Company, Architects, Order Number 2302, August 7, 1919."

B. Bibliography

1. Unpublished Sources

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2. Published sources:

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August 1, 1984

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

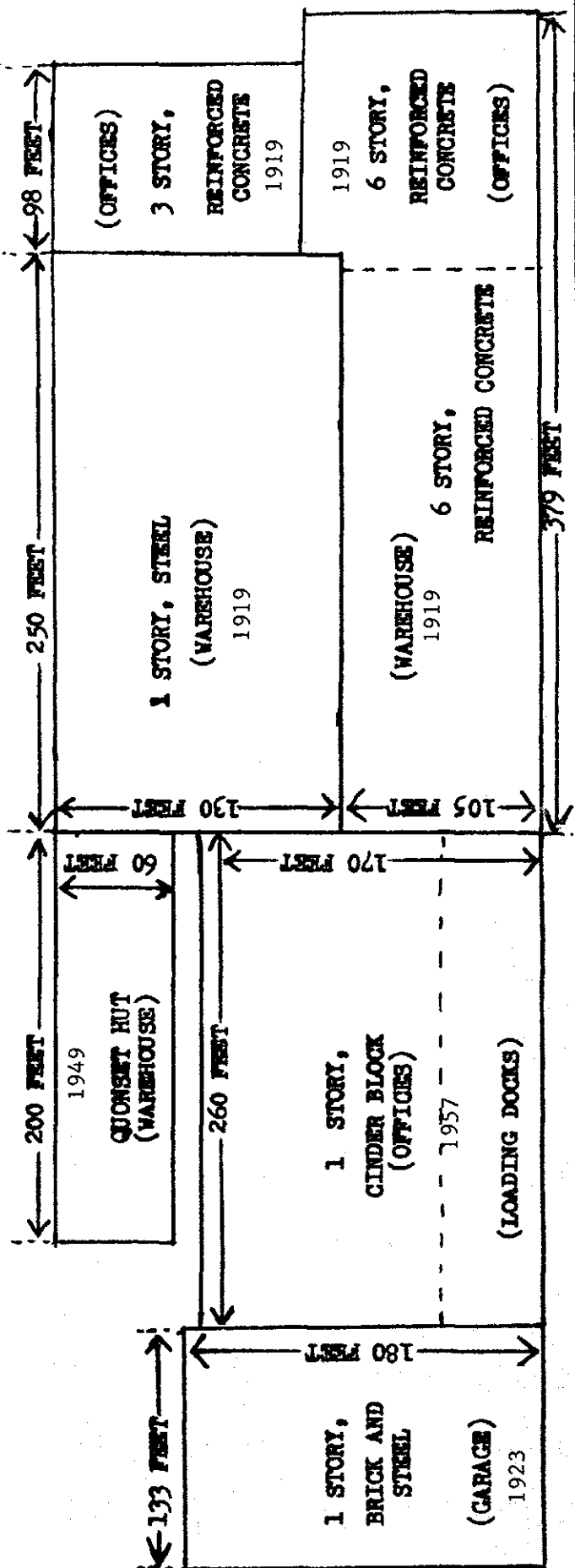
Federal Agency: Urban Development Action Grant Program
Department of Housing and Urban Development

Project: Harborside Project (American Natural Resources Project)

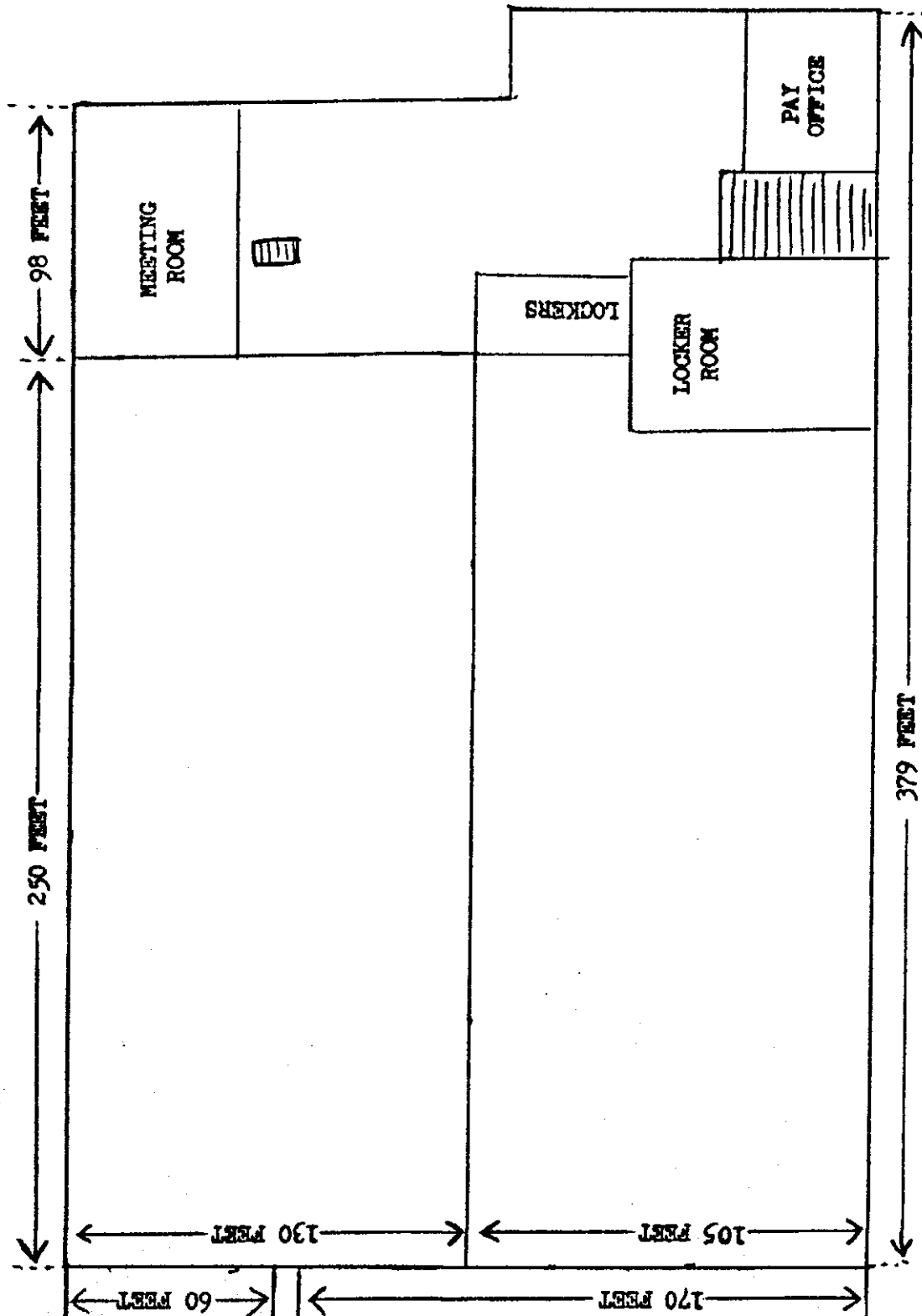
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Records prepared on August 1, 1984

Transmitted by: Jean P. Yearby, HAER, 1985

SITE PLAN
(ONE INCH EQUALS APPROXIMATELY 75 FEET)
1 AUGUST 1984



PLAN OF FIRST FLOOR
 (ONE INCH EQUALS APPROXIMATELY 50 FEET)
 1 AUGUST 1984

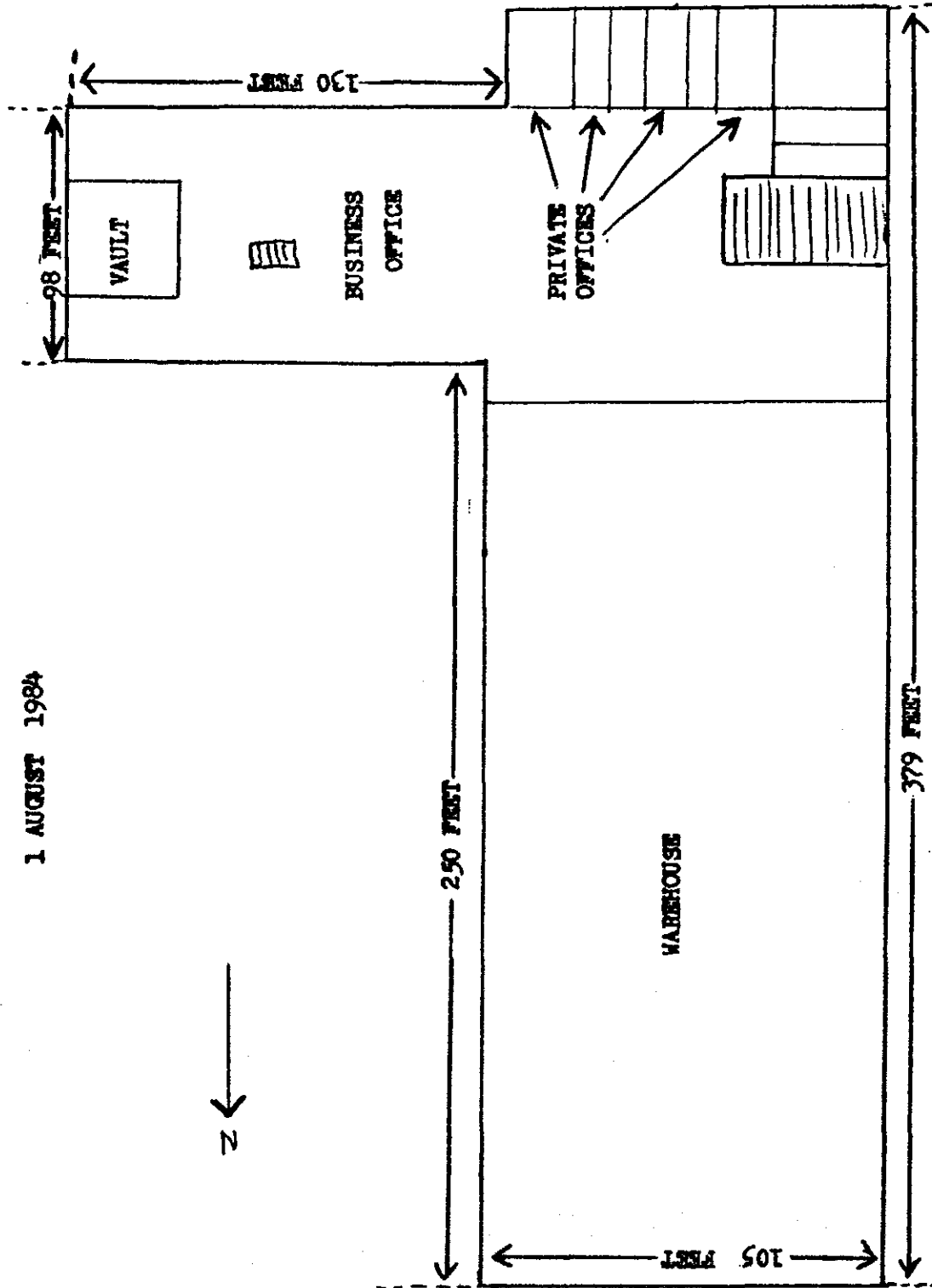


ADAIR STREET

PLAN OF SECOND FLOOR

(ONE INCH EQUALS APPROXIMATELY 50 FEET)

1 AUGUST 1984

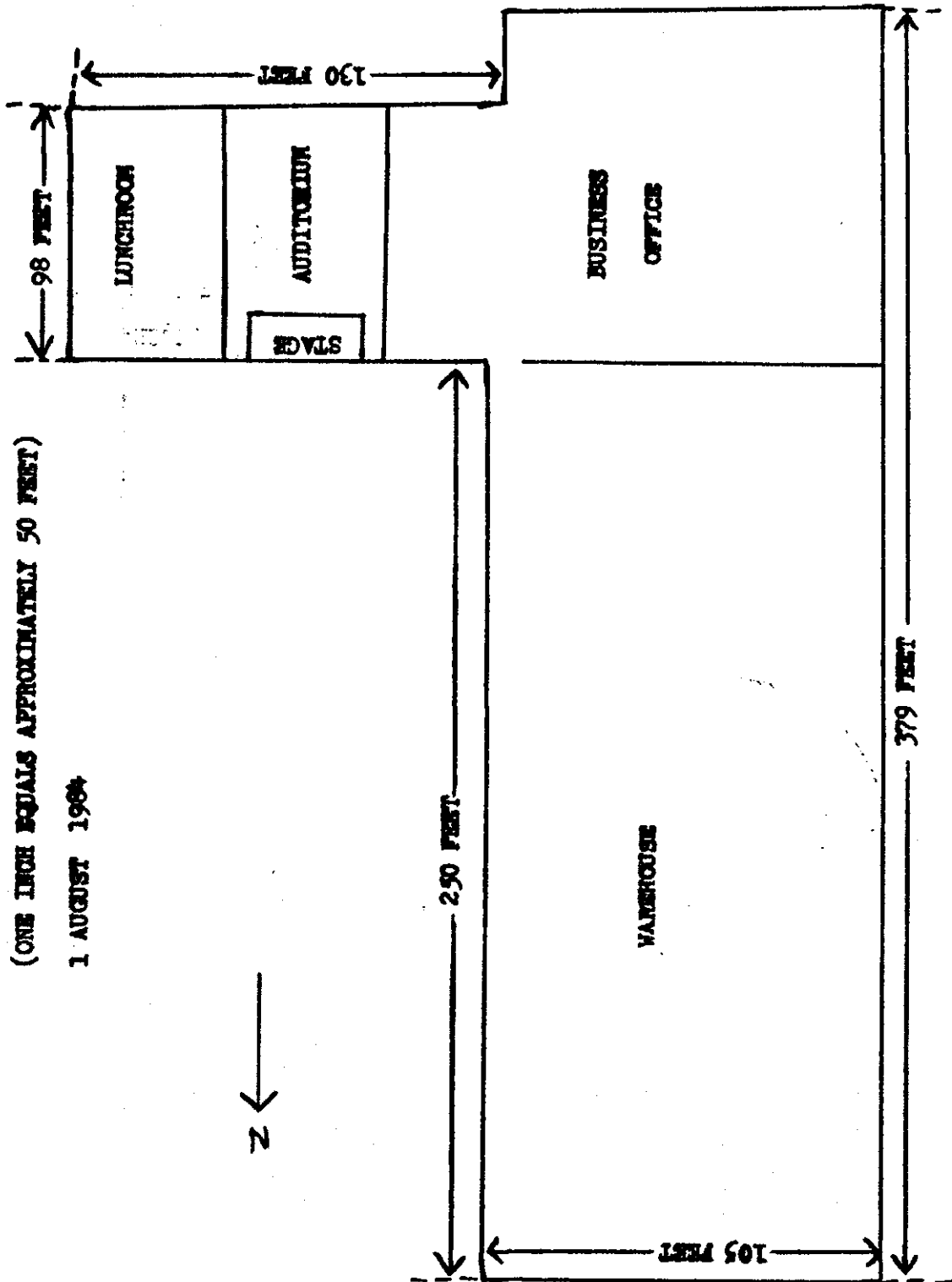


ADAIR STREET

PLAN OF THIRD FLOOR
(ONE INCH EQUALS APPROXIMATELY 50 FEET)

1 AUGUST 1964

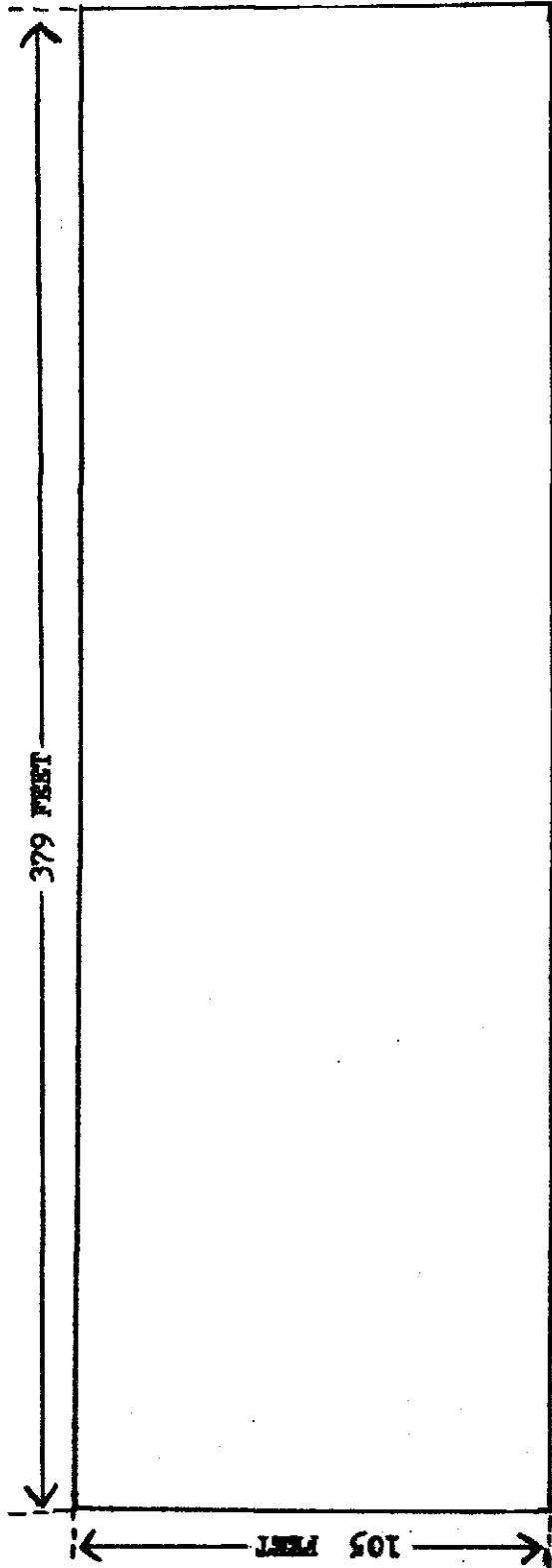
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ADAIR STREET

PLAN OF FOURTH, FIFTH, AND SIXTH FLOORS
(ONE INCH EQUALS APPROXIMATELY 50 FEET)

1 AUGUST 1984



ADAIR STREET